

did this only after the Congress came together in an extraordinary moment of bipartisan unity and passed this as mandatory legislation.

In my office, over and over again, with just about every senior Biden State Department nominee, I asked them: Please don't turn one of the biggest foreign policy victories of the last several years into one of the biggest foreign policy defeats of the last several years.

The reports came out, actually, that State tried to honor its commitment; that State—the Department of State—in the interagency process, argued for “let's follow the law; let's impose the sanctions.” And what public reports have suggested is that the Biden White House—the political operatives in the Biden White House—overruled State.

So even though State knew that the right policy was “shut down the Putin pipeline” and the wrong policy was “turn it into the Biden-Putin pipeline,” the Biden White House desperately wanted to stamp their imprimatur on this, because if it was done under President Trump, they were going to reverse it.

The second reason is that the Biden foreign policy team, for whatever reason, has a deep and abiding interest in giving to Germany whatever it is they want.

Now, look, Germany is an important friend and ally. We work together closely with Germany on economic matters, on diplomatic matters. We have long and positive relationships with our friend and ally Germany. It doesn't mean we agree with everything the Germans do, any more than we agree with everything any other ally of ours does.

Indeed, I will point out, in the past week, the Biden administration precipitated the French withdrawing their Ambassador from America—an extraordinary moment, which, I will point out, at least illustrates that we have a history of having disagreements, and sometimes serious disagreements, with our friends and allies.

But one friend of mine has a phrase—he puts it—that the Biden foreign policy establishment, they sleep with votive candles of Angela Merkel under their beds; that they view Chancellor Merkel as someone who must be surrendered to, acquiesced to no matter what. Never mind that Chancellor Merkel has an extremely limited tenure in office. She is on her way out. Never mind that the next successor government in Germany may well decide that they don't even want Nord Stream 2. This Biden foreign policy team, perhaps as a farewell gift to Angela Merkel, has decided that President Biden should surrender to Putin. That makes no sense. That is dangerous. It is harmful to Europe, it is harmful to Germany, it is harmful to America, and it helps Russia.

We are going to have an extended period of time to continue to discuss these matters, but at this point, I see

that Senator SHAHEEN is preparing to speak, so I yield the floor to Senator SHAHEEN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The Senator from New Hampshire.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mrs. SHAHEEN. I appreciate my colleague from Texas being willing to turn over the floor so that I can give my remarks.

Mr. President, I am here today to discuss my concerns about the ongoing partisan obstruction in the Senate. First, as everyone here knows, September 30 is the end of the current fiscal year, and without action by the Senate on a continuing resolution—the mechanism to continue to fund the government—our government is going to shut down at midnight on the 1st.

So what happens if we don't pass that continuing resolution and the government shuts down? Well, critical operations will shutter. We have seen this picture before. Our national parks will close. We can tell our government researchers, including Nobel Prize-winning scientists, to leave their labs, and we would be doing this in the middle of the greatest health crisis of our lifetime.

A government shutdown also means that we ask essential Federal workers to work without pay. FBI agents, Border Patrol agents, TSA workers, weather forecasters, and others would be forced to continue their essential work, and they would be doing it for IOUs. We would promise them we would pay them, but there is no guarantee.

Now, it is puzzling to me because other countries don't do this to themselves. Government shutdowns put America behind. Look at the government shutdown that we had that went from December 2018 to January 2019, the longest government shutdown in our history. While our space scientists were at home, China landed the first rover on the dark side of the Moon—something that we had not done.

The continuing resolution before us also includes resources that will help Americans whose homes were flooded, homes were destroyed by raging wildfires or by hurricanes, including Hurricane Irma. They deserve our help, not more political infighting or partisan bickering.

We also owe it to our Afghan allies, who put their lives on the line to assist U.S. soldiers, to pass this bill. It contains critical assistance to help them resettle after facing imminent danger from the Taliban.

So from emergency housing assistance to resources for health screenings, job training, and other essential services, we can't let our allies down. We have already let some of them down because we weren't able to get everyone out of Afghanistan, and we are still working on that. But to then say “You are on your own” despite years of helping the United States? That is just patently unfair.

Secondly, as we are discussing the continuing resolution and keeping the government open, one of the things that our colleagues, our Republican colleagues, have said is that they are not going to increase the debt limit. I think we in Congress have a solemn obligation to protect the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government.

Treasury Secretary Yellen has told Congress that the Treasury will exhaust extraordinary measures that they have been using to pay our Nation's bills sometime next month. And let's be clear. The prospect of the first-ever default on our Nation's debt obligations would be disastrous for our economy at a time when we can least afford it.

Raising the debt ceiling is not about whether or not we should spend more money or incur more debt; raising the debt ceiling is about paying the bills we already owe, the bills that come due from the previous administration.

Minority Leader MCCONNELL himself has voted to increase or suspend the debt limit 32 times. And when President Trump was in office, Democrats in this Chamber—and I was one of them—supported raising the debt ceiling three times because we understand that it is grossly irresponsible for us to renege on obligations that our government has already incurred.

As a former Governor, one of the worst fears I had as New Hampshire went through challenging times during a recession, during a court-ordered change in how we funded our schools, was that the State would have its bond rating lowered. That would mean we would have to pay more on money owed. It would have an impact on everyone in New Hampshire. This is sort of the equivalent of having the bond rating lowered for New Hampshire, only 100 times, 1,000 times over. No; this is that on steroids.

Now, because we have a Democratic President, Republicans are saying they won't lift a finger to prevent this catastrophic outcome for our economy, for our currency, for the full faith and credit of the United States of America. This is not a game. The stability of our economy and the financial security of working Americans are at stake, and we have an obligation to pass legislation that has been sent to us by the House to keep our government open and to raise the debt limit. This isn't just about the United States; this has implications for our entire global financial system.

Sadly, Mr. President, the partisan brinkmanship and obstruction doesn't end with domestic and economic matters. I am also very concerned about the dangerously slow confirmation process of our State Department nominees and Ambassadors. What we have seen is a few Members of this body who are threatening our national security by slowing the process to schedule nomination hearings for qualified nominees, preventing votes on those State Department nominees who have

been approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Today, only two Ambassadors have been confirmed by the Senate. This administration has had to wait over 200 days for its first Ambassador to be confirmed, compared to only 62 days for the previous administration. For the first 300 days of the previous administration, 55 State Department nominees were confirmed by the Senate, and now, as we approach the first 300 days of the Biden Presidency, this Senate has only confirmed 14 appointees.

Now, I agree with my colleague from Texas about the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline. I think we need to sanction it. But I am not willing to shut down the government, to allow the actions of this government to grind to a halt because I am concerned about that issue.

If Senators are concerned about our national security, they would match deeds with words and confirm career State Department nominees who have been waiting for months. When we look at the increasing global threats to the United States, operating with a depleted diplomatic corps jeopardizes our national security, U.S. interests, and the safety of Americans at home and abroad.

These political games are really risking serious consequences. It must stop. I know we can work together in a rational, bipartisan way to address the country's needs. I have seen it. I believe my colleagues who are holding things up love this country, but I am concerned that their actions don't show that they love the country.

There is no excuse for delaying or hindering the basic functions this legislative body is constituted to perform, and I urge all of our colleagues to join us, to get to work. Let's get this done. Maybe, if we do that, we can address some of the other concerns that we have that we ought to be able to work together and compromise to get done. That is what I am going to continue to try to do, Mr. President.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, George Washington, in his farewell address to the Nation, warned us against foreign entanglements and costly wars. He and the other Founders knew firsthand the danger that enduring engagement abroad posed to our Republic and to the cause of freedom.

Despite those warnings, we, the United States, have been embroiled in a directionless, trillion-dollar war in Afghanistan for the past 20 years.

And after all that investment—the American blood and treasure poured into that cause—Americans watched in

horror as any semblance of the so-called progress and investment in a democratic Afghanistan crumbled in a matter of weeks. Haunting images demonstrating this failure tragically played out before us. Americans hadn't seen tragedy of this type since the Fall of Saigon.

The Costs of War project at Brown University estimates that the total monetary cost of our war in Afghanistan amounts to \$2.3 trillion, counting U.S. military spending, both on and off budget. U.S. manpower, resources, and expertise were dedicated for decades to the war in Afghanistan.

So we must ask ourselves: What went wrong?

I rise today to explain how the erosion of Congress's constitutional war-making role permitted and, in fact, enabled these failures.

In the early years of the war, Congress shrugged as the President transformed the mission in Afghanistan. President Bush addressed the Nation and the servicemembers going to war in October of 2001, promising "To all the men and women in our military—every sailor, every soldier, every airman, every coastguardsman, every Marine—I say this: Your mission is defined; your objectives are clear; your goal is just."

At the time, the mission was clear. The goals were to capture the terrorists responsible for the September 11 attacks, neutralize the threat posed by al-Qaida in Afghanistan, and ensure the Taliban was not strong enough to provide a safe harbor to al-Qaida.

In 2003, we had substantively accomplished each of those goals. Though killing Osama bin Laden would take until May of 2011, the Taliban had fallen and the leaders of al-Qaida went into hiding outside of Afghanistan. And yet, despite this reality, the Bush administration shifted the mission to physically rebuilding Afghanistan and reshaping the country's government and culture as if to mirror our own.

Even as the mission in Afghanistan was changed dramatically and unrealistically, Congress did not repeal or replace or amend the 2001 authorization for the use of military force in Afghanistan.

The Constitution charges the legislative branch to not only fund but also declare and oversee wars, and yet Congress seemed unaffected by the rather dramatic change in mission and strategy.

As a result, the war continued for longer than it should have—much longer—and the United States continued to lose tax dollars, lives, and any attachment to the original goals all at the same time.

As building a democratic Afghanistan became the new mission, Presidents of both parties and the interagency apparatus ignored explicit evidence of failure and, in fact, doubled down on American investment and involvement.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction—created by

Congress to oversee and audit funds used for nation-building in Afghanistan—has delivered 427 audits and more than 250 reports to Congress since 2008, detailing the risks, the waste, and the mismanagement in the U.S. mission. Many of these reports pointed out contradictions of our aims and explained the waste, fraud, and abuse plaguing the funds Congress appropriated for the reconstruction projects of all sorts.

Now, thanks to the investigative journalism of Craig Whitlock of the Washington Post, "The Afghanistan Papers" added another layer to the inspector general's reports, revealing evidence that high-ranking officials in the Department of Defense, in the State Department, and the White House knew that the U.S. mission had no focus, no metrics, no clear coordination, and no defined enemy.

Douglas Lute, a three-star Army General who served as the Afghanistan war czar under President Bush and President Obama, is quoted in the published interview saying "We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan—we didn't know what we were doing."

While I share the view with the majority of Americans that withdrawing forces from Afghanistan was the right choice and was, by all accounts, inevitable at some point, the Biden administration's disastrous withdrawal was the culmination of American failure in Afghanistan.

Kabul fell to lawlessness and mass panic. Afghan security forces laid down arms to the Taliban. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled his nation. And the evacuation was so poorly directed that potential terrorists and men with child brides secured seats on U.S. evacuation flights while American citizens were left behind enemy lines. Our Nation lost 13 servicemembers, with many more seriously wounded, to a terrorist attack, and the administration ineptly responded by killing 10 innocent civilians, including 7 children.

President Biden's closing of the war in Afghanistan has been riddled with avoidable mistakes, resulting in both tragedy and embarrassment of historic magnitude. The President and other high-ranking officials must be held accountable for this failure. Anyone else engaging in such mismanagement of our actions in a theater of war would surely be held accountable, and they must too.

Throughout 20 years of engagement, Congress itself has shamefully failed to respond to an executive branch plundering powers that constitutionally belong to Congress. It is time for Congress to do its job. It is time to ensure that such a grave mistake that cost us so much in American taxpayer resources, but most importantly in American blood, will never, ever happen again.

Some of my colleagues and I may disagree on when and exactly how to use military force, but we should debate those matters in the light of day for